

I am writing in opposition to the proposed bill No. 5322 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A HUMAN SERVICES PERMIT AND A REQUIREMENT THAT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS CONDUCT HOME VISITS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

I have been a school social worker for over 20 years in Connecticut and I'm glad to see that the needs are getting more attention... however I've been concerned already that the increased demand for social workers in schools might lead to a watering down of our expertise and an overlegislation of what our role should be.

Mandating a quota for home visits is inappropriate and shows a lack of understanding of the purpose and efficacy of home visits. There are some situations where it is quite appropriate and helpful to conduct home visits and others where it just isn't necessary or beneficial, or even safe. To make us do them without trusting our professional judgement as to whether it is needed is making us "check a box off" for possibly no benefit and a great deal of time lost from our buildings and the students we serve. There are also practical/logistical/safety reasons that this should not be dictated. In many areas, it is not safe to conduct a home visit alone. Some homes are just not safe to be visited at all. In my district we are not allowed to do home visits alone. So now we are talking about taking two staff people out of the school at the same time. Setting up home visits is also an undertaking that can take time during the school day. I often need to make several phone calls to reach a parent, find a mutually beneficial time and also reschedule if something else comes up (for me or the parent). I also have had the experience of scheduling a home visit, even calling right before coming out, and still not finding someone at home when I arrive, thus having to reschedule the home visits. In some areas the time to drive to conduct a home visit can also be problematic. In my building we have students who can live 30 minutes away from our school. So that home visit would take me out of the building for at least 90 minutes. There is also an expense to the clinician and the district as far as gas and wear and tear on our personal vehicles. I assume the district would be responsible for paying for the mileage, but there may also be parking fees that need to be paid, not to mention possible car damage due to poor road conditions. My biggest concern is the amount of time that this takes us out of our buildings when we are already stretched incredibly thin trying to meet the mental health needs of our students and the behavioral concerns in our buildings. Yes, home visits can be pivotal in reaching a family and building a positive relationship, but home visits are not the only way we are able to do this.

I also have grave concerns with allowing mental health workers at the bachelor's level work as mental health providers without proper training or supervision. They do not have sufficient training to be ready to take on the responsibility of providing school counseling, especially when we consider some of the very complex and troubling situations that we see in our schools. If a school is to utilize a mental health worker with only, for example, a BSW, they need adequate supervision as well as screening as to whether a case is appropriate for their skill level. I currently have a BSW working with me and she does have some counseling cases but she works under me, I approve all her cases and we have weekly supervision (as well as daily discussions) to discuss those cases in depth. But to have them fill these positions without that level of guidance and support is quite alarming. We owe it to our students and their families to provide them with appropriate and competent mental health support.

I hope you consider these concerns and, again, I oppose the passing of Bill No. 5322. Thank you for your time.

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Every Student, Every Day, Every Classroom